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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6778  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 8018  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 1755  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 1960  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 1942  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC

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SENSITIVE  
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SUBJECT: MAHARASHTRA STATE LEADER RESIGNS, RECRIMINATIONS CONTINUE

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Citing the call of his "inner voice," the Deputy Chief Minister and Home Minister, R.R. Patil of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has resigned from the Maharashtra state government. The press speculates that Congress Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh might be the next to go. The search for accountability in the press and public has increased since the siege of the hotels ended, and, as the state's senior most leaders, Deshmukh and Patil are the easiest targets. Congress contacts tell Congenoffs that there is tremendous pressure to act decisively, but the roster of capable, dynamic Congress politicians from Maharashtra is not long. End Summary.

Maharashtra Home Minister R.R. Patil the First To Go

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¶2. (U) A day after the resignation of Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil, Deputy Chief Minister and Home Minister R.R. Patil, of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), was the first to tender his resignation. After days of denying that there was any reason for him to resign, Patil told reporters, "I have gone by my conscience and decided to take this step." (Note: The NCP, led by Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar, broke away from the Congress Party in 1998, following Sonia Gandhi's assumption of the Congress presidency. A regional party, the NCP is strongest in Maharashtra, where a NCP-Congress coalition government rules. Patil is the highest ranking NCP official in the state government. End note.) Patil likely offered his resignation at the behest of party leader Pawar. Patil was criticized for his comments underplaying the severity of the attacks, saying "such minor things happen in big cities."

Maharashtra CM Deshmukh Likely to Follow

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¶3. (U) Maharashtra Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh has also offered to resign. "I accept moral responsibility for the terror attacks and have offered to resign. It is up to the Congress Working Committee to decide whether to accept my resignation," Deshmukh told reporters at a press conference in Mumbai on December 1. He tendered his resignation to Congress

Party President Sonia Gandhi on November 29. The press has roundly criticized Deshmukh for his casual manner after the attacks, and for a widely publicized tour of the Taj and Oberoi hotels on November 30, for which he brought his actor son, and a noted director of Bollywood horror films. (Deshmukh claims their participation was a "coincidence.") Prithvi Raj Chavan, the Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, Sushil Kumar Shinde, the Union Power Minister, and Ashok Chavan, the Cabinet Minister for Industries and Protocol, are all being touted as potential successors to Deshmukh.

Congress Soul Searching~.

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¶4. (SBU) Maharashtra state Congress Party spokesperson, Anant Gadgil, told Congenoffs that the terrorist attacks on Mumbai were a tragedy for India, and an "embarrassment" for the Congress party. He said that Congress President Sonia Gandhi was "furious" at her security team, and acknowledged that the state and country were "not prepared" for these attacks. Gadgil admitted that the Indian public was angry at its government officials. He participated in the funeral procession of slain Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) chief Hemant Karkare, and heard bystanders hurl insults and taunts at politicians; at the funeral, people in the crowd were whispering, "you corrupt police are responsible for the death of one of your own." According to Gadgil, his contacts in Madhya Pradesh say that the Congress will now lose the Madhya Pradesh elections, which took place on November 27. He also said these attacks will make it impossible for the Congress to hold elections earlier, in January or February, regardless of the outcome of the ongoing

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state elections. In Maharashtra, Congress party workers tell him that the Indian government must "act decisively" against Pakistan to regain credibility.

¶5. (SBU) Gadgil told Congenoff that CM Deshmukh has offered to resign, but the Congress Working Committee (CWC) will decide whether or not to replace him after the visit of Indian President Prathiba Patil to Mumbai on December 1. Gadgil had recommended that Deshmukh be replaced over a year ago, but Deshmukh's ability to raise funds from industrialists for the Congress' election war chest, and the lack of any better alternative, made dislodging him difficult. He acknowledged that none of the proposed replacements are dynamic or strong leaders, and will not have the desired effect of restoring confidence in Congress leadership in Maharashtra.

~And BJP Plans For More Politics

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¶6. (SBU) Piyush Goyal, BJP national treasurer and advisor to BJP leader L.K. Advani, told Congenoffs Deshmukh would have to resign soon. He called CM Deshmukh "lackluster and weak," and criticized the Congress for continuing to pander to "communal vote banks." Goyal noted that Advani's comments in Mumbai immediately after the attacks were designed to rise above politics and inspire Indians to unite against terrorism. However, he asserted that the BJP would make an electoral issue of the Mumbai terrorist attacks, as the party has consistently derided the Congress for its "weak-kneed" response to India's security. The BJP might be criticized for this, he acknowledged, but he believed that these attacks have only

confirmed the BJP's position. He added that when the Home Secretary briefed Advani at 7 pm on November 27, the Home Secretary admitted that the information he had was seven hours old.

#### U.S.-India Law Enforcement Cooperation Praised

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17. (SBU) Goyal told Congenoff that he and his family lost several friends in the attacks. In response to the tragedy, he and some local industrialists have formed a non-partisan group to make security recommendations to the government, including the establishment of a federal investigative agency and the procurement of better weaponry for security forces. Referring to articles about the arrival of the FBI's investigation team, he said that he hoped the police would have the "good sense" to welcome and cooperate with law enforcement experts from all over the world. Gadgil also praised the arrival of the FBI team, and offered to raise the issue at the political level if the local police refused cooperation.

18. (SBU) Comment: The Congress Party nationally as well and its Maharashtra leadership continue to take heat from the public over their handling of the terrorist attacks. Clearly, many aspects of the response were out of the hands of local leaders, but Mumbaikars are asking the Congress and NCP to show that they are listening, and that they will take security seriously; the casual manner and insensitive comments of Deshmukh and Patil will not help their case any. Nevertheless, Deshmukh has managed to ride out almost a decade of dissatisfaction against his government, mainly because he is the least objectionable leader among a number of uninspiring alternatives. He may survive just yet. End Comment.  
FOLMSBEE